

**Testimony of Tom Ariss  
Sheriff of Warren County Ohio  
August 23, 2005**

Good Morning

Chairman Souder and members of the sub-committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Tom Ariss, the Sheriff of Warren County Ohio. Warren County is located in the Southwestern part of this State. We are the second fastest growing County in Ohio, growing from approximately 152,000 citizens in the 2000 census to approximately 200,000 citizens at the present time.

I have been in law enforcement since 1957. I retired from the Ohio State Highway Patrol and have been Sheriff for over 13 years. I have served in the United States Army as a Military Police Officer, and also worked as a Patrol Officer with the Springboro Police Department and as a bailiff/probation officer for our County Court.

Over these years I have been involved in numerous arrests and cases involving various kinds of drugs.

My most memorable drug arrest involved a local young man I believe aged 20. I had arrested him for a DWI violation and a failure to stop violation. In a subsequent search of his vehicle, I located four grocery bags of marijuana and numerous hits of LSD and PCP.

He was also arrested for the drug violations.

What keeps this in my mind was his age, and also that prior to his case being heard in the local Common Pleas Court he was murdered in Greene County. Information that I later learned was that he was killed because he did not pay for the drugs that I had confiscated from his vehicle.

Warren County has a very active, and I might add, pro-active and progressive Drug Task Force for approximately eight years. The success of this program is through the efforts of our County Prosecutor, our local Warren County police departments, township police agencies, the Wilmington Police Department, The Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Identification, the FBI and members of the Warren County Sheriff's Office.

Local townships, cities and villages have over the years contributed funding for our Drug Task Force. Our Warren County Commissioners match dollar for dollar these contributions. Without this funding the Task Force could not exist. Federal Byrne Grant has assisted in our funding.

Additional funding resources could be enhanced if federal forfeiture funds could be allocated for salaries of Task Force employees. My understanding is that Attorney General Gonzales can expand or permit this usage.

We presently work with the Ohio HIDTA Group based in Cleveland, and we now have a HIDTA group for the Southwestern area. I presently Chair this Southwest Ohio HIDTA Group.

Warren County has seen a large growth in the production of methamphetamine over the years. Last year, 2004, our Drug Task Force investigated 8 meth labs cases.

So far this year, 2005, the Task Force has been involved with 15 meth labs. As these numbers grow, we will more than likely triple the number of meth cases from 2004.

We, the local law enforcement agencies have been involved in numerous types of meth labs, from the mobile, to the motel, to the home, to the garage and to the shed. Our most recent meth lab production operation involved locating the remnants of a lab in a local farm pond.

Site work and clean up are dangerous and expensive. There are numerous recorded incidents involving meth labs where there have been explosions and injuries and where labs have been booby-trapped.

We have been lucky.

Folks, quite frankly the influx of the manufacturing and also the use of meth frightens me, unlike any of the other challenges I have faced in my law enforcement career.

If we think of those non-involved individuals who are victims of this scourge and how it also affects their lives and living conditions it is frightening. Remember the farmer whose pond is now contaminated with these dangerous chemical residues. The same applies to motel and hotel proprietors. The costs associated in the clean up of these sites are tremendous. Their property is contaminated and there is definitely a true loss of their property value. I shudder when I think of the innocent family who rents the motel room next to the meth lab. These potential victims do not even know that they are sleeping next door to what is effectively "a bomb".

As citizens of this great nation, we are acutely aware of the threats of international terrorists. But, I submit to you ladies and gentlemen, that this epidemic is more of an immediate threat than the terrorist.

Everyone is a potential victim. This scourge crosses all lines of the social- economic strata. The poor, the rich, the doctor, the lawyer, the factory worker on his way to work, and the day laborer on her way home all could be in danger. These drugs do not discriminate by religion or skin color. These drugs ruin lives and they can and do kill.

If everyone is not safe, then none of us are safe. As law enforcement executives, we owe our citizens nothing less than our full attention to this growing problem

Thank you